



FEWS/ Famine Early Warning System

FRAMEWORK FOR FOOD CRISIS CONTINGENCY PLANNING and RESPONSE

July 6, 2000

Table of Contents

Preface	iv
1. Introduction	1
1.1. Key Concepts	1
1.1.1. Famine	1
1.1.2. Food Crisis	1
1.1.3. Food Crisis Sequence	2
1.2. Focus on Slow-onset Food Crises	2
1.3. Desirable Pre-conditions and Institutional Arrangements	3
1.4. Organization of the Guidelines	4
Part One: Contingency Planning	5
2. Contingency Planning Steps	5
2.1. Set Contingency Planning Objectives	6
2.2. Identify Sources of Threats to Food Security	6
2.3. Identify Indicators and Sources of Indicator Information for Monitoring Each Threat	6
2.4. Trace Out Likely Food Security Outcome Scenarios	7
2.4.1. Area or group	7
2.4.2. Season of occurrence	7
2.4.3. Chronology of recent shocks	7
2.4.4. Broad food security context	7
2.5. Set Thresholds for Increasing Severity of Threat	8
2.5.1. Classify a food security outcome scenario	9
2.5.2. Establish provisional levels of vulnerability	9
2.5.3. Trigger action	10
2.6. Prepare Prototype Responses	10
2.7. Strengthen Logistics and Operations	12
2.7.1. Obtain advance knowledge of logistics capacity and intervention options	12
2.7.2. Arrange advance access to resources	12
2.7.3. Improve management	12
2.8. Modify the Policy and Institutional Environment, as necessary	13
2.9. Develop Procedures for Disseminating Information and Dealing with the News Media	13
2.10. Develop Procedures for Issuing Increasingly Urgent Early Warnings	13
2.11. Plan an Exit Strategy	14
2.12. Update Contingency Plans and Procedures Routinely	14

Table of Contents (continued)

Part Two: Crisis Response	15
3. Assessing Impact and Needs	15
3.1. Set Objectives for the Assessment	16
3.2. Put Assessment Teams Together	16
3.3. Determine Information Needs	18
3.4. Use Multiple Methods to Gather Information	18
3.5. Draw Conclusions about Impact and Needs	19
3.6. Issue Interim Findings and Write Assessment Report	19
3.7. Continue Post-Assessment Monitoring	20
4. Implementing a Food Crisis Response	21
4.1. Link Contingency Plan with Results of Impact and Needs Assessment	21
4.2. Review and Select an Appropriate Mix of Response Options	21
4.3. Develop Relief Response Proposals	22
4.4. Implement the Relief Plans	22
Annexes	
1. Completing the Food Crisis Sequence	
A1. Recovery and Development	24
A1.1. Set Recovery and Development Framework — Objectives, Approach and Timing	24
A1.2. Build a Recovery and Development Framework	24
A1.2.1. Mount a team to review options and develop recovery framework	24
A1.2.2. Conduct the recovery and development review	24
A1.2.3. Seek consensus for the recovery and development Framework	24
A1.2.4. Identify priority recovery and development investments	25
A1.2.5. Design Recovery and Development Projects	25
A1.3. Implement Longer-Term development Programs and Projects	25
A2. Evaluation of Response and Recovery	25
A2.1. Monitor Conditions on an Ongoing Basis	25
A2.2. Evaluate Impact of the Relief Response and Recovery Program	26
A2.3. Document Key Lessons Learned	26
Update Contingency Plans and Procedures Regularly	
2. Drought Management in Southern Africa: Timeline and Checklist of Contingent Actions in advance of <i>el Niño</i>, 1997-98	27
Partial Bibliography	29
Boxes	
1. Food Crisis Sequence	2
2. Typology of Food Crises	3
3. Summary Steps for Developing a Contingency Plan	5
4. Hypothetical Examples of Drought-related Indicator Thresholds	9
5. Example of a Contingency Plan Decision Tree for a Semi-arid, Agro-pastoral Area	11
6. Summary Steps for Assessing Impact and Needs	16
7. Generalized Comparison of Objectives for Assessing Impact and Needs	17
8. Food Needs Assessments	20

FEWS GUIDELINES: FOOD CRISIS CONTINGENCY PLANNING and RESPONSE

PREFACE

These FEWS *Guidelines* are directed primarily to field-based early warning and food security (EW/FS) professionals operating at the national and regional level in Sub-Saharan Africa, such as FEWS field representatives and their colleagues, who monitor food security conditions, assess their implications and report conclusions. In some cases, these professionals mainly focus on detection, early warning, and identification of vulnerable groups. In other cases, these professionals also participate actively in food crisis contingency planning and response.

In all cases, however, the role of these EW/FS professionals in food crisis contingency planning and response is likely to be influenced by their other responsibilities, priorities, and time constraints; disciplinary expertise; available resources; expectations from headquarters; what others are doing; and the particular institutional arrangements in which they work. Personal experience and professional judgment also determine the extent of their participation.

EW/FS professionals are in the business of food security information analysis and early warning. They should not participate in each step of the contingency planning and response process. However, these *Guidelines* summarize all of the essential steps so that EW/FS professionals understand the full context of the process and how their work fits in.

These Guidelines reflect the stage of review and discussion within FEWS at the end of FEWS III. Further development of these contingency planning and response procedures must await the next phase.

1. INTRODUCTION

FEWS III embodies three objectives:

- provide accurate famine early warning information to USAID (and US Embassies) and African counterpart agencies and officials;
- identify specific at-risk populations; and
- propose pre-emptive actions for preventing immediate and future famine.

These Guidelines address the third objective, the role of EW/FS professionals in food crisis contingency planning and response. For the most part, this role concerns providing early warning and vulnerability analysis information to decision-makers to enable them to better prepare for and respond to food crises. This role is considerable and significant, but may not always be visible. These *Guidelines* summarize the basic elements of food crisis contingency planning and response so that EW/FS professionals can approach their participation with more understanding and confidence, adding value to the significant work they already do and giving them greater influence with those in charge of responding to food crises.

1.1. Key Concepts. A brief discussion of several key concepts is in order to set the framework for these *Guidelines*. These concepts concern *famine*, *food crisis* and *food crisis sequence*.

1.1.1. Famine. Famine is typically associated with a sharp deterioration in economic conditions, extreme social disruption, and some degree of excess mortality (Webb and Richardson, in Riely). Famine is distinguished by “episodic mass starvation” (Downing). These *Guidelines* thus define famine as “an extreme collapse in local availability and access to food that causes a widespread rise in mortality from outright starvation or hunger related illnesses.”

These *Guidelines* are also shaped by the following famine concepts (Field):

- *Famine is a process*, a slow-onset phenomenon, the cumulative result of weakening access to food. It is a process of stress and destitution that *can* result in a famine outcome.
- *Famine conditions* are reached when destitution (the involuntary disposal of productive assets) occurs, often culminating in distress migration.
- *Famine is an outcome* that accompanies destitution or follows destitution. It is the final, but not inevitable, stage of the famine process in which people starve, suffer disease, and die in unusually large numbers.

These famine concepts have several significant consequences. First, the potential for famine and the incidence of past famines can be measured, studied, and diagnosed. Second, programs and policies can be developed to reduce the frequency of famines (prevention) and reduce the impact of famine conditions (mitigation) when they occur. Third, early warnings can often be issued far in advance so that responses can be made in time.

1.1.2. Food Crises. The whole point of early warning of worsening food security conditions is to avert a famine outcome. Indeed, there are multiple opportunities during the famine process to protect lives and livelihoods so that famine is avoided and food insecurity problems do not proceed beyond the level of food crisis.

A food crisis is defined as a “state of grave food insecurity (or physical danger) indicated by a preponderance of available information” (AID, R4 AFR/SD/CMR). A food crisis can also be considered as a decisive turning point where food insecurity must lessen or soon change for the worse. While these *Guidelines* prepare EW/FS professionals for confronting famines, they are geared to “preventing, mitigating and transitioning out of crises” (AID Strategic Objective 10).

1.1.3. Food Crisis Sequence. A food crisis, like a famine, has a predictable lifecycle or sequence — unless preemptive actions are taken to break the sequence along the way. Box 1 traces the phases in this food crisis sequence from pre-crisis prevention of food insecurity and preparedness for crises to post-crisis recovery and development. The bullets indicate appropriate action to take.

Box 1. Food Crisis Sequence
<p>During normal times (risk of food insecurity in general)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent food insecurity • Prepare for food crises • Monitor food security conditions • Develop contingency planning institutions and procedures <p>When a food crisis threatens (emerging evidence that a specific group or area is likely to experience worsening food insecurity)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reactivate contingency planning groups and procedures • Issue early warnings <p>When the food crisis intensifies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess impact and needs <p>As the food crisis continues and peaks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide relief to meet immediate needs and mitigate impact <p>As the food crisis wanes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate rehabilitation, recovery and development • Evaluate response(s) and lessons learned

Adapted from FAO Emergency Activities *Technical Handbook Series*, 1999

Box 1 depicts the phases in the food crisis sequence as if they were strictly linear or sharply distinct. They are not. These phases overlap in time and location and interact with each other. Results from an evaluation of relief activities, for example, loop back to inform, adjust and improve prevention activities. More accurately, the food crisis sequence is a dynamic feedback process with multiple opportunities to arrest a crisis — or avert a famine.

1.2. Focus on Slow-Onset Food Crises. These *Guidelines* are written *mainly* for slow-onset, non-conflict food crises, as shown in the upper-left quadrant of the table in Box 2 below, where the bullets refer to the three objectives of FEWS. Early detection of at-risk groups is normally most possible in the case of slow-onset, non-conflict food crises caused by drought and related factors that have the potential to cause famines — where the distinguishing factor is often the effect on food availability and access through crop and livestock production. Moreover, drought is likely to dominate all other adverse events in many countries in terms of observed occurrences, probability of recurrence and magnitude of impact.

Box 2. Typology of Food Crises			
		Speed of Onset	
		Slow Onset	Sudden Onset
Causes	Non-Conflict ("Natural")	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue early warnings of food crises and potential famines • Identify specific at-risk groups • Propose actions to prevent or mitigate food crises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the impact of distinct events that have already occurred • Identify specific at-risk groups • Propose actions to mitigate food crises
	Conflict-related (Man-Made)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the impact of distinct events that are occurring or may have already occurred • Identify specific at-risk groups • Propose actions to prevent or mitigate food crises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the impact of distinct events that have already occurred • Identify specific at-risk groups • Propose actions to mitigate food crises

Increasingly in Africa, however, there is a need to assess the food security impact and potential for famine of slow-onset, *conflict-related* crises. There is also a need to assess the food security consequences of *sudden-onset*, natural and man-made disasters (including conflicts) that have *already occurred*. Moreover, some of these consequences may be foreseeable in time to give an early warning, identify vulnerable groups and plan for contingencies. In this manner, these *Guidelines* apply to these other types of food crises as well, those in the other three quadrants.

1.3. Desirable Pre-conditions and Institutional Arrangements. Food crisis contingency planning and response will be more effective under the following conditions:

- people and government in areas previously affected by famine, through their own efforts and with help from others, are actively taking steps to prevent future food crises (or famines) or mitigate their impact;
- the government and its partners have defined a food security policy and built an institutional framework for regular consultations and coordination of activities to strengthen national and local capacities in early warning, food security, and famine preparedness;
- there is reasonably good knowledge of which people are *chronically* food insecure (and thus more vulnerable to potential famine conditions) and which are *currently* food insecure (but may be able to transit out of food insecurity during the next period for recovery);
- there is reasonably good knowledge of the means by which these people cope with increasing levels of food insecurity in the short term and how they are adapting their livelihoods over time to changing circumstances; and
- there is a willingness to learn and apply lessons from previous food crises (or famines) when planning relief responses and longer-term development programs and policies.

An essential pre-condition for the effective use of these *Guidelines* is a functional contingency planning group within the country. A contingency planning group (emergency management unit, preparedness and prevention commission, food security unit — exact names vary) meets the need for a focal point that can carry out analysis, assess impact and needs, issue requests for aid, make decisions and set timetables, coordinate people and resources, standardize procedures and streamline operations. It functions as a central unit for receiving information as well as disseminating it. It manages logistical and

funding operations. In brief, contingency planning groups prepare for food crises, rather than react to them.

Four elements are particularly important for the organizational success of contingency planning groups. The first is the need for clear lines of authority, statements of responsibility and channels of communication between individuals (or functional units) of a contingency planning group. This includes explicit and frequent links between EW/FS staff and decision-makers so that staff can convey their findings to the top. As some contingency planning groups are not active all year, it is important to spell out who reactivates the group, how and when.

Experience shows, secondly, that food crisis (or famine) contingency planning groups must be staffed with sufficiently senior personnel who can speak up, make decisions and take charge. Lines of authority that may be less significant during the *planning* phase become vital during a *response* phase. This implies some degree of operational autonomy for the head of the contingency planning group.

The third element is adequate budgetary support. While a small contingency planning group may have no need of budgetary support if all costs are borne by parent ministries and donor agencies, larger and more permanent contingency planning groups will require a permanent budget and staff and sufficient authority to spend funds.

Fourth, close affiliation of key donors, NGOs and UN agencies with the contingency planning group (if not membership in it) is useful for building an early consensus about the possible severity of a looming crisis and next steps for action, preferably based on joint assessments and analysis. Such close communication and coordination between the governments and its partners will save valuable time and resources.

1.4. Organization of the *Guidelines*. These *Guidelines* summarize the essential steps of the food crisis contingency planning and response process. They cover the measures that can be deployed as worsening food insecurity threatens to cause a food crisis, as the food crisis intensifies, and as it peaks and then wanes. The emphasis in these *Guidelines* is how information and analysis from EW/FS professionals can be linked to response and action.

These *Guidelines* start from the phase in the food crisis sequence when there is *emerging credible evidence* that a specific socioeconomic group or area is likely to experience worsening food insecurity that threatens to cause a food crisis. This is a key distinction. Focusing on an *imminent specific threat* bypasses the steps involved in general contingency planning for non-imminent threats — evaluating the reliability of data or records about all adverse events, estimating their probability of occurrence, measuring their magnitude on food security and comparing the impact of various adverse events as a way to set planning and preparedness priorities.

These *Guidelines* are organized according to the food crisis sequence.

- Part One, *Contingency Planning*, describes the steps involved in food crisis contingency planning as the first signs are emerging of a specific food crisis.
- Part Two, *Crisis Response*, talks about a) assessing the impact of a food crisis and the resulting needs as the food crisis is underway and intensifies, and b) implementing a food crisis response as the food crisis continues.
- Annex 1 briefly highlights the remaining steps to complete the food crisis sequence as the food crisis peaks and wanes — recovery and development and evaluation. These final steps do not normally fall within the duties of EW/FS professionals and are relegated to an annex.

PART ONE: CONTINGENCY PLANNING

2. CONTINGENCY PLANNING STEPS

Contingency planning is a deliberative process in which objectives are set, food security outcome scenarios are classified in advance according to a set of critical thresholds, indicators or conditions, managerial and technical actions defined for each scenario, and systems put in place in order to better respond to a potentially critical situation. In this manner, contingency plans are an *incremental framework* — a decision tree — for all subsequent action to be taken by specified agents. This planning is called contingency planning because each specific action or response is *contingent* upon a preceding action, event or condition.

Contingency plans aid planning in an uncertain environment. Contingency planning makes systematic use of information about different plausible outcomes of an event (weighted by the probability of occurrence according to past experience or medium-term forecasts) and about the impact of each outcome (depending on the path taken) to identify a preferred response strategy in advance of the occurrence of the event (or season, outcome and so on). Moreover, contingency planning ahead of a problem offers many more programming options and cost savings than responses planned during a crisis.

In the case of threats to food security, contingency planning includes measures taken in advance to develop institutional capacity and mechanisms to respond rapidly and effectively *at the earliest signs* to avert food crises or, should they occur, to reduce their intensity, duration or scale.

Box 3. Summary Steps for Developing a Contingency Plan

- Set contingency planning objectives (within short-term and long-term relief and development principles of the national food security policy).
- Identify sources of threats to food security at national and sub-national levels.
- Identify indicators and sources of indicator information for monitoring each threat.
- Trace out likely outcome scenarios for each anticipated threat and ability of people to cope a) by area or group; b) by season of occurrence; c) in terms of recent chronology of shocks; and d) by context.
- Set indicator thresholds for increasing severity of threat (or outcome) in order to: a) classify outcome scenarios; b) establish provisional levels of vulnerability; and c) define triggers for taking action.
- Develop prototype plans, based on response objectives, a matrix of response options, estimated budget, people's vulnerabilities and capacities and other factors.
- Strengthen logistics and operations by a) obtaining advance knowledge of capacity and intervention options; b) arranging advance access to resources, and c) improving management.
- Modify the legal and institutional framework, as necessary, to grant authority to contingency planning bodies, expedite responses, and implement enabling policies to facilitate responses.
- Develop procedures for issuing increasingly urgent early warnings.
- Develop procedures for disseminating information and dealing with the news media.
- Plan an exit strategy.
- Update contingency plans and procedures routinely and following a crisis.

The sequence of steps for developing a generalized food crisis contingency plan is summarized in Box 3. These are the steps that need to be taken, though not necessarily or directly by EW/FS professionals.

Section 2 provides guidelines for shaping a generalized contingency plan for food crises (if one exists) into a contingency plan *for a specific threat*. At this phase in the food crisis sequence, the first signs are emerging that a specific socioeconomic group or area is likely to experience worsening food security. If the contingency planning group acts promptly, there may still be time to mitigate worsening food insecurity and prevent a food crisis.

2.1. Set Contingency Planning Objectives. To be most useful, contingency plan objectives (or principles) need to be as explicit as possible. *Based on their experience and insights, EW/FS professionals may participate in discussions leading to these objectives.* Contingency plan objectives serve as a compass at the outset, reminders along the way, and reference points for post-crisis evaluations. It is critically important to actively deliberate and decide on these objectives to establish broad “ownership” and agreement. If these objectives are articulated well, they are less likely to be forgotten during the heat of response. The objectives themselves set the parameters for selecting and planning suitable responses while rejecting others.

Contingency plan objectives can set objectives at the strategic level, such as: *Household food security shall not be compromised by drought* (Namibia) or *No human life shall perish for want of assistance in time of disaster* (Ethiopia). Other plans may set sector-specific or policy-specific objectives, such as: *Preserve adequate reproductive capacity of livestock herds in affected areas during drought* or *The community shall play a leading role in the planning, programming, implementation, and evaluation of all relief projects.*

2.2. Identify Sources of Threats to Food Security. The next step is to systematically identify all relevant potential, or sequential, sources of threats to food insecurity at national and sub-national levels in order to have a comprehensive view of the problem, required response, and response options. *FS/EW professionals are particularly suited for identifying threats to food security.*

For the purpose of these *Guidelines*, the source of a visible threat is presumably known. This step is a reminder to check for other, less proximate sources.

2.3. Identify Indicators and Sources of Indicator Information for Monitoring each Threat. Information for monitoring threats must be as timely as possible, although in many cases there is a tradeoff between incomplete, imprecise but timely information and more complete, more precise but late information. Identifying the right indicators includes identifying the source of indicator information, *steps for which EW/FS professionals are well prepared.*

Rainfall — from weather stations or satellite data — is likely to be one of the most useful indicators. As a single *synthetic* indicator, rainfall synthesizes many relevant factors into one, easing the task of early warning monitoring. In addition, rainfall is likely to have broad *generic* applicability in virtually all cases and, thanks to time series data, allow for comparison against a *norm* for the relevant location and period.

In most instances, use of multiple indicators is necessary for corroboration. Practical indicators are those that are directly measurable, objectively understood, cost-effective to collect, replicable over time, and available regularly and frequently. All or most indicators can be expressed in quantitative

terms, such as the decrease in the quality, size, and number of daily meals from 3 to 2 (or from 2 to 1). Prices, in particular, can be readily expressed in percentage change or absolute terms.

2.4. Trace Out Likely Food Security Outcome Scenarios. When threats occur, they are often called adverse events or shocks. Not all shocks occur rapidly nor is their impact always felt immediately. In the food crisis sequence, a shock might stretch out over time, such as a failure of the rainy season, or its impact be delayed.

Trace out the likely primary and secondary impacts of each shock or combination of shocks on food security as if no offsetting or mitigating actions were taken. Simulating the sequential impact of helps determine *how* to respond to mitigate impact. More importantly, this simulation indicates *when* and *where* in the food crisis sequence a response can have greatest effect. The simulation itself is called an *outcome scenario*, a scenario-based projection of what could happen to food security if present conditions run their course without special interventions. **EW/FS professionals should participate actively in this step.**

Paying special attention to the area or group affected, season of occurrence, chronology of recent shocks and broad food insecurity context will enhance the accuracy and realism of these outcome scenarios. A more accurate outcome scenario can better determine the type of response required for each scenario in terms of urgency, complexity, duration, budget, management and staffing, and related factors.

2.4.1. Area or group. People in various geographic areas or socioeconomic (or food economy) groups have different livelihoods reflecting differences in access to resources, production patterns, diversity of income sources, exchange opportunities, and food consumption. It follows that these people are likely to be vulnerable in different ways to an adverse event, where vulnerability is defined as exposure to food insecurity and inability to cope.¹ Health status, education level and access to social services and support networks also strongly influence vulnerability. More importantly, vulnerability changes over time to incorporate social responses as well as new rounds of adverse events.

2.4.2. Season of occurrence. Seasonality is a temporal and cyclical dimension that strongly influences the vulnerability to food insecurity of people in different areas or groups. The season of occurrence of a shock is thus important and perhaps even vital. Seasonal differences in the vulnerability of groups and areas should be considered in contingency planning as these affect the food security outcome scenario.

2.4.3. Chronology of recent shocks. While famine is the outcome of a long process, a single catastrophe — such as crop failure, a devastating livestock disease, or collapse of income — might push some households into the vulnerable category. Thus, it is critical that outcome scenarios take into account the chronology of recent shocks and the duration of their impact — their cumulative effect on food security status. As patterns of vulnerability are *contingent* on past conditions, the impact of a one-time adverse event differs greatly from that of cumulative adverse events. The length of time that households in a given group or area have been recently threatened and weakened is a major factor determining their resilience for responding or maintaining satisfactory levels of food security. Review the past two or three current vulnerability assessments to help trace the chronology of recent shocks that a given area or group has undergone during recent years.

2.4.4. Broad food insecurity context. A fourth way is to trace out the outcome scenario according to broad food insecurity context. Most scenarios will fall into one of the following contexts:

¹ Households have a set of time-tested coping mechanisms that are used in a logical and ordered manner — from insurance mechanisms to divestment to migration.



- Normal, non-crisis context; threat or risk of food insecurity in general;
- Threat of a food crisis; high probability of a *specific* crisis occurring;
 - Slow-onset, non-conflict (“natural”) causes;
 - Slow-onset, conflict (man-made) causes;
- Intensifying food crisis;
- Famine conditions setting in; occurrence of famine;
- On-going (protracted) food crisis (or food emergency);
- On-going famine;
- Complex emergency context (threat of complex emergency or occurrence of complex emergency, including famine).

Related considerations are whether there is a functioning government in the threatened area and whether there is active conflict and other threats to public safety that require more extensive interventions (such as special security arrangements, airstrip repairs and communication networks) to compensate for the destruction of social and logistical infrastructure.

Depending on the type of shock or adverse event and the availability of information, outcome scenarios will not be equally correct or accurate. This will require periodic reassessments while the adverse event is underway.

2.5. Set Thresholds for Increasing Severity of Threat. The next step is to set thresholds — key indicators, benchmarks or conditions — by which increasingly severe threats of food insecurity or crisis can be defined or classified. These thresholds are context-specific and must be set for each area or group. Thresholds can be expressed in quantitative or qualitative terms, or both. Thresholds can be expressed in terms of ranges as well. Use of quantitative thresholds needs to be complemented by sound judgment and interpretation based on experience, as well as expert opinion and community views. Conversely, qualitative thresholds should be complemented by empirical measures wherever possible. *FS/EW professionals can help to set thresholds within the contingency planning group, using their group or area-specific knowledge.*

Box 4 illustrates a few examples of both quantitative and qualitative thresholds or indicators. These hypothetical thresholds increase in severity. Actual indicators need to be set with respect to each area and socio-economic (food economy) group in question.

Box 4. Hypothetical Examples of Drought-Related Indicator Thresholds				
	Normal	 Increasing Severity of Threat 		
Indicators				
Meteosat dekadal rainfall estimates (RFE)	RFE $\pm 15\%$ of normal	Cumulative deficit dekadal RFE $>15\%$	Cumulative deficit $>33\%$	Cumulative deficit $>50\%$
Crop conditions for time of season	Crops sown as usual (area, input use and timing)	Plant establishment failure $>25-33\%$; wide resowing	Uneven plant development; stunting $>33\%$ of crop	Grain-filling failure $>50\%$; cash crop failure 50%
Evidence of distress sales and slaughter of livestock	None	The occasional weakened animal sold for low price	More animals sold or slaughtered; prices drop	Many animals sold or slaughtered; prices collapse
Economic activity and exchange opportunities	Normal, reflecting local livelihoods and incomes	Usual economic and market activity slackens	Purchasing power falls sharply; begging increases	Local production systems and economy are near collapse
Changes in household eating habits	Usual seasonal consumption of wild foods	Appearance of wild foods on the market	Reduction in quality of foods, size and frequency of meals	Severe reduction in quality, size and frequency of meals

Reaching or approaching these thresholds sends a signal to the contingency planning group that new food security outcome scenario may be reached. With it, there is a decreasing period of useful warning for prevention, preparedness, and mitigation.

Such successive thresholds serve three purposes:

- classifying a given outcome scenario according to its severity;
- establishing provisional levels of vulnerability to a particular adverse event; and
- triggering a corresponding set of actions.

2.5.1. Classify a Food Security Outcome Scenario. Defining a graduated series of indicator thresholds — by area or group, season of occurrence, chronology of recent shocks and food security context — is the first step towards classifying a given scenario according to its probable severity for the affected group or area. With quantifiable indicators, it is possible to estimate a normal (or baseline) range of seasonal fluctuations and then define a *set* of standard classifications based on deviations outside the normal seasonal range and the consequent ability of the affected people to adjust or manage to meet their own needs (taking their current vulnerability into account). *These classifications can be calibrated to match food security categories — food secure, moderately food insecure, highly food insecure or extremely food insecure — that correspond to the increasing threat of food crises or famine conditions.* These standard classifications also facilitate comparison between areas or socioeconomic groups.

As an outcome scenario should not be classified on the basis of one indicator alone, additional quantitative or qualitative indicators, where available, should be used to corroborate the level of classification. For example, rainfall data can be evaluated in conjunction with NDVI, rates of plant establishment, terms of trade for key price relationships, and numbers of children registered at supplemental feeding centers as a *composite set* of indicators for classifying a food security outcome scenario for the relevant groups or households. It is important to note that these outcome scenario classifications can reverse direction as indicators show signs of worsening or improving.

2.5.2. Establish Provisional Levels of Vulnerability. Increasingly critical thresholds establish corresponding provisional levels of vulnerability to a particular shock and — implicitly or

explicitly — the urgency and scope of the required response. This often constitutes the *first phase* of targeting of assistance, usually at the lowest administrative level for which reliable data are available. However, reaching or exceeding an indicator threshold does not necessarily mean that every household is needy and eligible for relief. Other screening criteria, such as on-site impact and needs assessments (section 3.), are needed to verify conditions in the affected area and identify those households that qualify for relief assistance, the *second phase* of targeting. These impact and needs assessments should be used in conjunction with results of the most recent current vulnerability assessments, for which food security categories are identical.²

2.5.3. Trigger Action. Lastly, contingency plans link these indicator thresholds to procedures for taking action, where a set of graduated thresholds might ratchet up the urgency of action or response from one level to another. A critical point is that these thresholds serve as *built-in reminders* to review the options for action and that the review of possible actions be triggered fairly automatically. The only actions required in the earliest phases might be to heighten monitoring, investigate conditions on site, or reconvene the relevant contingency planning group (see Box 5).

The threat of intensified food crises is a critical moment in the work of EW/FS professionals. They need to report their information, analysis, and conclusions *proactively* through multiple channels, including off-the-record briefings or confidential conversations with the right people at the right levels.

Responsibility for taking action and the manner in which it is taken is a political decision for the government, often in conjunction with key partners (although it is reasonable to expect EW/FS professionals to suggest improvements in the *process* for informing these decisions, if necessary). Of greater concern to EW/FS professionals is that those taking action have sufficient authority and resources for following through.

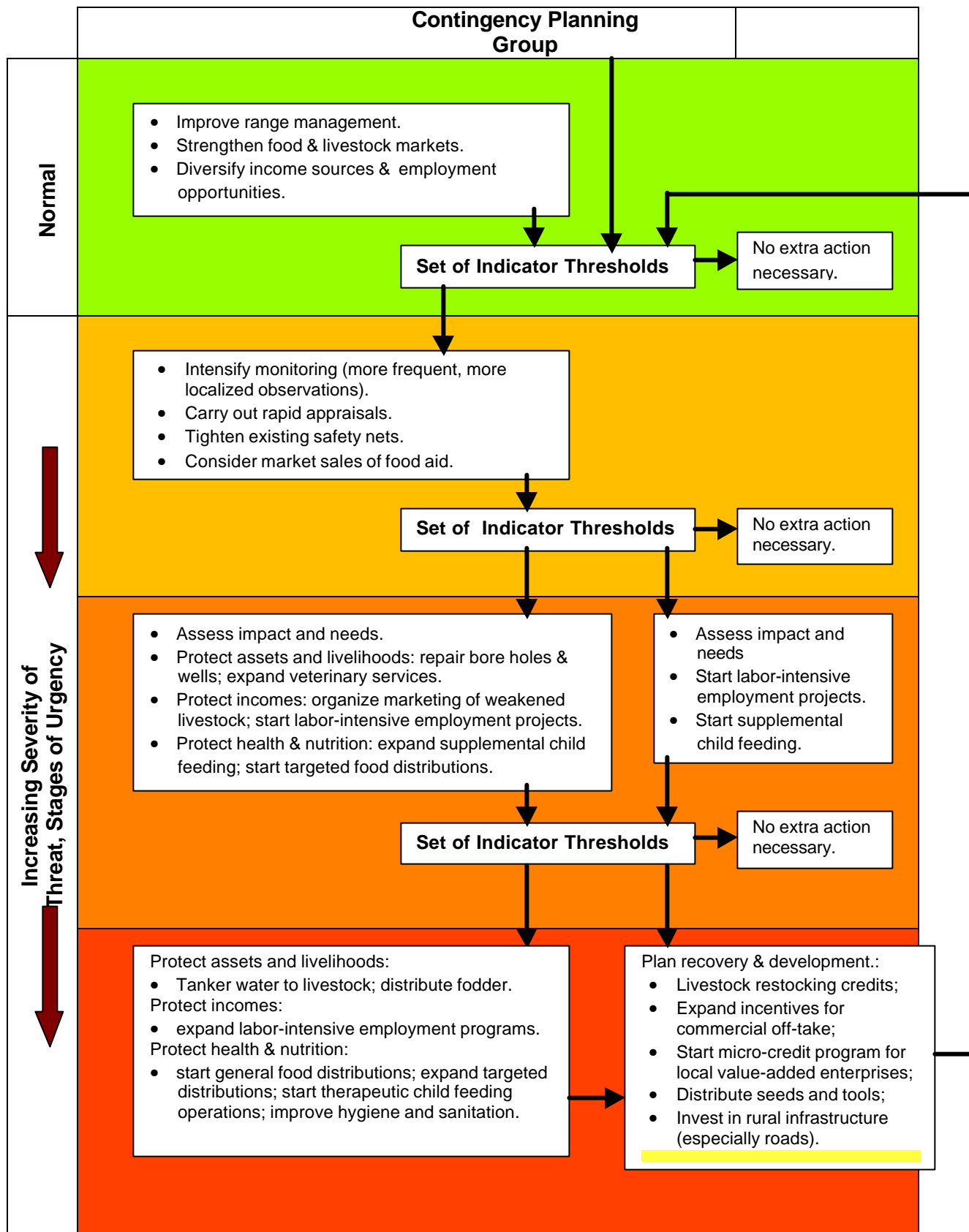
2.6. Prepare Prototype Responses. The next step entails preparing prototype responses based on contingency planning objectives, key assumptions and the outcome scenario of a *specific* threat of famine conditions. These prototype responses facilitate a quick response. Sketching out a response and reaching advance agreement on its general parameters and other measures to ensure readiness saves valuable time later if conditions worsen. These draft response plans can take location-specific factors into account, such as the local culture and socioeconomic environment; reflect the affected people's priorities and their capabilities for helping in the response effort; take advantage — and be aware of — of seasonal cycles to achieve desired results; and find means to bring the affected people together and avoid aggravating prior social tensions in the community. Note that these draft response plans ought to include policies and programs as well as projects.

These draft plans may not contain sufficient detail to serve as a blueprint for immediate implementation. Each response plan needs to specify contracting and implementation procedures, material and management requirements, payment options, logistical arrangements and cost estimates in terms of desired impact as well as criteria for scaling up and scaling down operations and employment. These considerations will vary by location, duration, scale, and other factors. Once formulated in greater detail, these response plans are to be “shelved” until previously identified indicator thresholds (or conditions) trigger action — or until routine updating is required. A tricky challenge is to prepare response plans whose benefits are greatest as famine conditions set in and not too attractive for routine implementation.³

² Note that formal current vulnerability analysis (for which various methodologies exist) results in a *once-a-year* snapshot of vulnerability, whereas outcome scenario classifications can be revised or updated *at any time*.

³ Considerations for selecting a response and preparing a response plan are summarized in Section 4.

Box 5. Example of a Contingency Plan Decision Tree for a Semi-arid, Agro-pastoral Area



The contribution of EW/FS professionals may be greatest in posing the necessary questions to guide planning and select broad categories of responses as well as pointing out where one particular approach is more appropriate than another. **However, EW/FS professionals are strongly advised not to get drawn into the details of planning an actual response.**

2.7. Strengthen Logistics and Operations. Sound contingency planning needs to consider the logistics and operational capacity for scenario-based response options as well as their resource, funding and management implications.

The contribution of EW/FS professionals to the logistical aspects of contingency planning will not be essential, but under appropriate circumstances, they might review draft logistics plans as an informed resource to ensure the practical workability of these plans and identify possibly overlooked areas. EW/FS professionals should not participate in day-to-day logistics operations.

2.7.1. Obtain Advance Knowledge of Logistics Capacity and Intervention Options.

Arguably, response options should be assessed first on the basis of needs (what is *desirable* in terms of type of response), making logistics a secondary consideration. In practice, however, selection of responses is greatly influenced by logistical constraints (what is *feasible* in terms of possible response).

One of the first tasks is to assess national, regional, and local logistics capacities, particularly where these are poorly known or following a serious deterioration in conditions. These assessments identify physical or material shortcomings where bottlenecks might occur in the logistics chain so that necessary repairs and improvements can be made before famine conditions set in. Otherwise, part of the initial response might have to be diverted towards improving the logistics infrastructure, such as extending airstrips or repairing access roads.

2.7.2. Arrange Advance Access to Resources. Arrangements with suppliers for the contingent urgent use of resources — food, funding, personnel, equipment and logistics services — are a central part of a comprehensive contingency plan.

In view of the long pipeline period between ordering and distributing food aid from abroad, contingency planners must locate nearby sources of food and make standby arrangements for its use. When food is needed immediately, options include borrowing from nonemergency sources (such as release of national food stocks), diverting ships at sea, or buying supplies regionally. After distribution is underway, it may be necessary to arrange follow-up food purchases or aid deliveries. Non-food resources can be equally vital to saving lives, such as temporary shelter and blankets, drinking water and basic medicines, and seeds and tools. Resources and services needed to set up displaced persons camps represent another dimension.

Funding is critical to all of this. Where feasible, multi-year funding arrangements (such as WFP's Extended Emergency Operations Programs, or EEMOPs), facilitate access to resources by obviating the need for annual approvals and easing documentation requirements for release of funds.

2.7.3. Improve Management. Effective logistics management entails streamlining decision-making systems and administrative and financial procedures for allocating resources sensibly; setting up systems to closely track donor commodity pledges, pipeline status and deliveries; and enhancing local procurement of supplies and other resources. Once famine conditions threaten, a field communications system must be set up for a regular flow of information between affected areas, forward staging bases and headquarters. Logistics operations may need to call on trained outsiders for specialized assistance.

Plans for each outcome scenario should take into account the key roles that affected people themselves can play. These usually include community consensus-building and adjustment of responses to fit local sensibilities, local-external relations, emergency self-government and decision-making in camps, as well as provision of labor and managerial-supervisory skills for relief and recovery activities.

2.8. Modify the Policy and Institutional Framework, as Necessary. It may be necessary to modify or remove any legal obstacles that prevent or delay an immediate and effective response within the desired timeframe. This step is necessary when a coordinated response to a largescale food crisis first requires a formal declaration of food emergency and request for assistance — without which donors, UN agencies and NGOs cannot respond or a county's own resources cannot be drawn upon. Extended delays in issuing such a declaration cost precious time as the optimal period of response shortens. A second instance is where there is missing, ambiguous or outdated legislation that imposes delays or rigidities on the ability of NGOs, local authorities and the private sector to respond effectively.

Serious defects in the legal and institutional framework may not be exposed until the moment of crisis. EW/FS professionals can document these defects. However, channels for suggesting reforms depend on arrangements in each country and **it is not expected that EW/FS take a direct hand in modifying the policy and institutional framework.**

2.9. Develop Procedures for Disseminating Information and Dealing with News Media. Keeping the national public well informed about the magnitude and impact of a food crisis is a measure that usually helps to squelch rumors and maintain calm during a period of potential confusion. Evidence of a prompt, effective and coordinated response to a food crisis will further build public confidence and support of the response measures. Sensitizing the international public is just as important, particularly when overseas donors and agencies are a major source of relief supplies.

Thus, contingency plans need to develop policies and procedures for information dissemination and public relations to ensure balanced news coverage, especially for highly visible or protracted emergencies. The contingency planning group can set up an information or public affairs unit that solicits, centralizes and verifies all information — preparing visual displays, maps, situation reports and issuing daily press releases, and maintaining an up-to-date crisis response Web site. This unit can facilitate press interviews and visits to affected areas as a means to educate the public and rally support for the response. It is advisable to designate one or two spokespersons who speak on behalf of those in charge.

This media policy needs to extend to the role of EW/FS professionals who participate in the contingency planning group by defining the procedures by which they provide their technical assessments of the food security situation, its likely evolution and the dimensions of need. **EW/FS professionals can advise and review these information dissemination and media policies.**

2.10. Develop Procedures for Issuing Increasingly Urgent Warnings. When there is credible, converging evidence that a food crisis threatens a specific group or area, **EW/FS professionals issue early warnings.**⁴ These warnings should be brief enough to be read but comprehensive enough to explain the nature and consequences of the problem.

On one hand, early warnings must not be issued so far in advance that they are ignored or forgotten. On the other hand, there may be little time to issue a useful warning and set contingency plans in motion when a food crisis is imminent or rapidly intensifying. Both *speed of onset* and *speed of buildup* of a food crisis are critically important for determining whether there is time to prevent and

⁴ See Chopak for a review of early warning concepts, tools and methods.

mitigate impact or whether there is only time to react. One way to ensure a systematic review of the options is to classify warnings by level of urgency.

Increasingly urgent warnings can be effective in raising awareness of worsening conditions and mobilizing resources for a contingent response. The contingency planning group needs to define procedures for classifying and issuing warnings according to their increasing urgency — identification of the key indicators and criteria by which a given threat requires ever more urgent and compelling action, classification and clearance of levels of warning, designation of the issuing authority for each level, procedures for issuing warning by the designated authority, and an explicit purpose for these classifications to serve.

As an example, the terms *alert*, *alarm*, and *emergency* illustrate the different levels, procedures and purposes of early warnings than could be adapted to specific country settings:

- *Alerts* are issued by EW/FS professionals in conjunction with national EWS through routine reports or other proactive and forceful means, as necessary. Monitoring of key indicator thresholds (or conditions) is intensified.
- *Alarms* are issued *as soon as possible* under authority of the EWS or contingency planning group. The content of an alarm will be less tentative. In view of rapid deterioration of conditions, alarms prescribe a set of essential responses, as drawn from contingency plans for prompt implementation.
- Relief to mitigate impact is needed immediately. Declaration of *emergency* to avert a famine outcome and related executive orders are issued *at once* by the head of the contingency planning group, national food security unit or designated senior authority for immediate action.

2.11. Plan an Exit Strategy. Expectations of an open-ended commitment of outside resources must be prevented as they are detrimental to eventual recovery. Each response requires an exit strategy or provision for review of the indicators that signal the phased withdrawal of external assistance. Such indicators include an increasing level of self-responsibility by the affected community for management of its own recovery and improved welfare. Clear understanding of these indicators — and how to measure them — will facilitate withdrawal of assistance later and avoid unnecessary misunderstandings and bad feelings. *EW/FS professionals can offer useful advice and technical review of these exit indicators.*

2.12. Update Contingency Plans and Procedures Regularly. Successful contingency planning is a dynamic process requiring frequent reviews and updating whenever underlying circumstances or capabilities change in a way that alters the context and content of contingency plans. These circumstances include development activities that succeed in reducing the threat of famine conditions; new information and data on risk factors; periodic changes in the institutional and legal framework as well as government-donor arrangements; lessons learned and other feedback from evaluations of recent famine responses; and periodic simulations to rehearse procedures that point out where the existing contingency plan needs to be improved. *EW/FS professionals can participate in periodic review of plans and procedures as their situations allow.*

PART TWO: CRISIS RESPONSE

Early warnings are not enough when a food crisis threatens. It is more critical how these warnings are acted upon. The contingency planning group provides the link between analysis and action. This the moment to reactivate the contingency planning group, if it doesn't meet regularly, to deal with the threat of a food crisis while more response options are available. (It may be necessary for the EW/FS professionals, who are among those most aware of the evidence, to nudge the group along.)

Early action is vital if the crisis is not to become significantly worse, but early action requires a commitment of both resources, political will to bring threatening conditions to the attention of senior officials, and responsible journalists to help the general public understand the nature of the crisis and build support for action. Annex 2 shows a timeline of contingent actions, based on implicit indicator thresholds, used by the SADC countries in 1997/98 to manage and prepare for *el Niño*.

3. ASSESSING IMPACT AND NEEDS

At this phase in the food crisis sequence, a food crisis is underway and may be intensifying for a specific area or group. The main role of EW/FS professionals now is to help inform the contingency planning group through participation in impact and needs assessments of nature of the crisis and the options for dealing with it.

The first step in formulating a crisis response is to assess the impact of the crisis and evaluate the resulting needs. These are closely related operations, usually carried out simultaneously or in rapid succession and often by the same team, for which a joint assessment report is written.

Assessment of impact and assessment of need go hand in hand. Together, they help to:

- investigate what is happening (or verify what has happened), how extensively and to whom;
- decide what action should be taken;
- find out whether this action can be managed locally or, if not, determine what extra help is required; and
- determine whether outsiders can provide this help and, if so, recommend how it should be provided.

Information about impact is critical because it helps to determine the type, level, and duration of response, if a response is needed. This leads to a quantitative estimate of emergency needs — primarily food, but also complementary non-food needs — at the household level. Fortunately, many households retain some resources that can be used to acquire food as well as their own capacities to rebuild their lives. But for some food crises, these resources and capacities may not be enough.

Impact and needs assessments need to be carried out during the earliest stages possible and periodically thereafter. The *initial* assessment, in particular, takes on greater importance and urgency because people's lives and livelihoods may be in jeopardy and because the first comprehensive⁵ response decisions and actions usually depend on it. In this manner, these assessments are distinct from routine field trips to monitor ongoing conditions.

Box 6 summarizes the basic steps for assessing impact and needs. In contrast to some of the contingency planning steps in which EW/FS professionals were not expected to participate, it is likely that EW/FS professionals will participate directly and actively in impact and needs assessments.

⁵ As opposed to the earliest *ad hoc* or interim decisions.

Box 6. Summary Steps for Assessing Impact and Needs

- Set objectives for the assessment.
- Put assessment teams together.
- Determine information needs.
- Use multiple methods to gather information.
- Draw conclusions about impact and needs.
- Issue interim findings and write assessment report.
- Continue post-assessment monitoring.

3.1. Set Objectives for the Assessment. The nature of the food crisis will determine the nature and specific objectives of each impact and needs assessment. A practical rule of thumb is that the resources devoted to an assessment should be proportional to the (presumed) magnitude of the impact.



Box 7 compares general objectives for impact and needs assessments. As seen, in some instances these objectives mirror each other. In other instances, objectives for assessing needs follow objectives for assessing impact. Both sets of objectives require information for continuing monitoring.

3.2. Put Assessment Teams Together. Assessment teams to visit the affected area or group need to be put together quickly by the contingency planning unit or other authority designated to take charge of the response to the specific famine conditions. Joint assessments, involving representatives from different organizations, are useful for coordinating diverse mandates and approaches, and possibly reducing the number of visits and interference in the affected people's lives at a moment of distress. Joint assessments, moreover, build consensus among partners on the nature and scope of the crisis and needed response.

- In the early stages, having more than two or three team members for each location is likely to slow the assessment or produce more information than necessary.
- An affected group or area may have continuing needs long after a crisis has peaked and waned. These needs may be great and diverse. If so, a sequence of assessment teams may be required by sector or locality. Such multiple teams and multiple visits increase the importance of coordination and communication to develop a comprehensive and properly-phased response plan.

Assessment team members should be selected foremost on the basis of their ability to carry out the assessment objectives. In this regard, EW/FS professionals are logical candidates as team members, circumstances permitting. Additional desirable features of team members include knowledge and understanding of the affected area; awareness of how gender roles and relationships within the community may have been changed by the onset of famine conditions; understanding of relevant policy concerns of the government and its partners as well as the mandate and roles of UN agencies; and the capacity to integrate assessment and planning to produce realistic and workable responses and shorten the time between planning and implementation. In this sense, the composition of the team should reflect different experiences and abilities and not neglect those with communications, community

Box 7. Generalized Comparison of Objectives for Assessing Impact and Needs

Impact	Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine and describe the immediate causes and impact of the food crisis within a food insecurity framework. • Estimate the magnitude of the food crisis based on key indicators (such as deviation from the pre-crisis baseline) and locus of impact. • Identify humanitarian indicators of impact (such as malnutrition rates, numbers of displaced people, and increases in mortality). • Assess which groups and areas are suffering and to what extent in the short and medium term. • Estimate the <i>approximate</i> population in the affected areas, the portion of the population in need of emergency assistance and the aggregate number of needy people. • Evaluate the affected people's <i>capabilities</i> (physical/material, social/organizational, and motivational/attitudinal) that remain intact and the nature of people's resilience and ability to cope with continuing adversity. 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess how different areas or groups are affected by the <i>current</i> impact of famine conditions and their resulting needs. • Describe in qualitative terms the socioeconomic characteristics of households needing assistance and assess how needs differ among groups. • Estimate <i>more precisely</i> the population in the affected areas, the portion of the population in need of emergency assistance and the total number of needy people. • Evaluate the affected people's <i>vulnerabilities</i> (physical/material, social/organizational, and motivational/attitudinal); distinguish between people's immediate needs and longer-term vulnerabilities. • Identify the most urgent needs objectively and comprehensively in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • nutritional support to meet immediate consumption and survival needs • income support for the purchase of critical inputs and essential non-food needs; and • preservation of productive assets to facilitate the transition of the affected population out of the food crisis. • Assess the general severity of needs and the consequence of not meeting those needs. • Assess administrative, logistical and funding constraints and capacities. • Identify and describe any longer-term problems that hamper or prevent quick recovery. • Recommend a response plan to meet those needs, including the appropriate mix of goods and services to provide, their quantity or size, methods of procurement and delivery, phasing of distribution and duration of response. • Set priorities among needs by group or location. • Identify information needs for ongoing monitoring of <i>needs</i> and <i>response</i> operations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify information needs for ongoing monitoring of <i>impact</i>. 	

development and finance, and logistics skills. In addition, at least one member should be a woman as separate meetings with women are often necessary to ensure that their views are heard.

Team leadership is important and often critical for assigning topics among team members, both for investigation and report writing; maintaining good relations within the team and between the team and affected community; and for summarizing the team's views and findings into a coherent report. A well-managed assessment can improve the credibility of the overall needs estimates, reducing uncertainty among donors that often delays the commitment of aid.

3.3. Determine Information Needs. Many of the information needs and analytical methods for impact and needs assessments are similar to those for early warning. The main difference is that the food crisis no longer threatens, but has set in and is intensifying. Thus, information needs during an impact and needs assessment will be more urgent and tightly focused on *supplementing what is known*. These needs will depend on the level of information, knowledge and analysis already available from the pre-crisis period.

All information needs stem from the specific objectives of the assessment team. Most assessments will require information, briefly, about:

- the nature of the food crisis (such as scale and extent of conditions, numbers affected, the main problems, implications for relief operations);
- the geographic areas affected (access in and out, available facilities and resources);
- the local or regional economy affected (such as the status of crops and livestock, and impact of the food crisis on markets, employment and exchange opportunities);
- the *vulnerabilities* of the people affected (their current and looming vulnerabilities, their particular socioeconomic and cultural traits that influence how well they manage crises and support themselves and others);
- the *capabilities and resilience* of affected people (where resilience is greatly influenced by season, depth of available material resources, lapse of time since the crisis set in, and at which stage in the sequence of coping strategies individuals find themselves, the reversibility of coping actions and recourse to remaining coping mechanisms);
- the particular case of displaced people (whose vulnerabilities and resilience also depend on the length of displacement and resource levels of the host communities); and
- what the government and others are doing (who is already working in the area and their capacities, who plans to respond, role of the news media, and level of awareness and concern).

3.4. Use Multiple Methods to Gather Information. Before visiting the area, the impact and needs assessment team should review information on hand and become familiar with the nature of pre-crisis production systems and local economy, the ethnic composition and cultural variations of the people and the extent of outside influences, such as NGO or donor activities.

Field visits (possibly including an aerial survey) are essential for direct observation of conditions and checking current records from local facilities. However, the most valuable information is often obtained by listening to people — traditional leaders, local government technical staff, people in other organizations and especially those directly affected by the crisis.

Two of the most common types of information gathering are semi-structured interviews and participatory rapid appraisals. Some of the best insights are gained when people are relaxed in familiar surroundings, such as their homes and workplaces. Conversations should be as participatory as possible, allowing people to express their views actively and freely. The team needs to be aware of possible

sampling and measurement bias. Many interviews with different sources of information can help to reduce sampling bias and participatory interviewing techniques can reduce measurement error. Corroborate interview information with secondary data and historical evidence as much as possible.

There may be no time for extended, participatory discussions when people need to be rescued or public health protected. Furthermore, some situations require systematic technical surveys to provide necessary data. Nutrition surveys, a method of assessing the level of malnutrition in children under the direction of trained professionals, are one such source of useful data. If *current* nutrition data are available during the impact assessment, it is important that the team interprets them correctly.

3.5. Draw Conclusions about Impact and Needs. As a first step, team members need to organize field trip data and observations by topic or indicators and by respondents or locations. This will indicate where information gaps exist. If the team is still in the affected areas, recall visits may be possible to obtain the missing information.

Review the objectives of the assessment team. Review, compare and discuss findings frequently as a team, at least daily when in the same location — all the more critical, the larger the size of the team. Answer questions in the assigned areas of investigation. Discussing observations and findings as a team at the end of each day is a means of gradually sharpening and articulating one's views.

- Systematically trace the first-round impact (and second-round impact, if discernible) of famine conditions on food security and try to estimate the magnitude of impact in each case for each group or area.
- Identify sectoral linkages and other connections that have been harmed by famine conditions, based on knowledge of previous household food economies and livelihood studies for each group or area, as well as other information reviewed before departure.
- Estimate or discuss the cumulative effect of the current crisis within the chronology of recent food crises and where households find themselves in their normal sequence of coping strategies.

Form an assessment of immediate and short-term needs:

- Consider the capacities (physical/material, social/organizational and motivational/attitudinal) of the affected people that remain after the crisis has set in;
- Determine the type, level and duration of response, if a response is needed;
- Estimate food and related, critical non-food needs (see Box 8 regarding food aid assessments); and
- Make recommendations and propose next steps.

3.6. Issue Interim Findings and Write Assessment Report. The team leader needs to coordinate and synthesize the contributions of each team member into a coherent and timely assessment report.

Assessment information is highly time-sensitive. If the impact of the crisis is worsening and needs are urgent or evolving quickly, the assessment team should release its *interim* findings or hold briefings with the contingency planning group (or government-donor coordination body, EW/FS colleagues or other groups) within a few days after returning from the affected area. The assessment

Box 8. Food Needs Assessments

Food needs are a subset of all needs. Even though it may appear that need for food aid is a foregone conclusion, assessment of needs and recommendations for a *food aid* response usually require different methods and specialized teams. Large-scale famine conditions require a team of various professional staff (such as senior advisor/macro-economist, socioeconomists, food security analysts, logistician/management analyst, market analyst, and nutritionist) as well as local specialists (in agriculture, food security, marketing, logistics and humanitarian relief) over the course of the assessment. The assessment team also requires back-up support for recruitment, transport, communications, logistics and computing resources.

A general approach to assessing emergency food aid needs, based on WFP, entails the following steps:

- Review the national aggregate food supply context.
- Identify different household groups by observable or verifiable characteristics in the affected areas (or use food economy groupings, where applicable).
- Estimate household income and expenditure balances for each household group.
- Determine ration sizes and their composition for each group.
- Determine the duration of food needs for each group.
- Estimate the size of population in need by each group.
- Aggregate needs of all groups for the duration of need and by month.
- Assess market conditions and capacities.
- Determine method of food distribution for each group.
- Consider targeting efficiency issues.
- Understand the institutional response capacity.
- Monitor needs continually as conditions change.

The report of the food needs assessment needs to address all the steps above in reaching a quantitative estimate of emergency food needs and addressing specific implementation issues such as food and other resource procurement options, targeting efficiency, market impact, links to development activities and absorptive and institutional capacity.

World Food Program.

EW/FS professionals may have uneven levels of direct experience with food aid and, in most instances, they will not be members of food need assessment teams. They **can contribute most significantly to the pre-assessment planning and post-assessment review of needs**. Once the food need assessment team's report is released, EW/FS professionals should review the report promptly and, within the contingency planning group, debate its contents, assess the options and make recommendations that can be acted upon quickly.

team should provide a) interim fact sheets on key findings, b) descriptive and graphic comparisons of key pre-crisis and crisis period indicators, c) up-to-date maps of the areas affected by the food crisis showing the spatial distribution of impact and concentration of affected people in relation to local public service facilities and road networks, and d) preliminary recommendations.

The *final* report, essential for soliciting contributions and support, should address all the points in the team's objectives. It should contain a rational, phased plan that responds to immediate and short-term needs. This report should be made available as soon as possible following the return of the assessment team.

3.7. Continue Post-Assessment Monitoring. There is a need to set up a data monitoring and collection system starting in the early phases of the food crisis that will serve as a baseline for the post-

relief evaluation of response. As conditions change over time, monitoring and assessment must be continuous so that responses can adjust to changing circumstances and adapt to people's needs. Priorities and objectives agreed at the beginning of a food crisis may look different several months later at which time an updated assessment becomes necessary.

4. IMPLEMENTING A FOOD CRISIS RESPONSE

At this phase, the food crisis continues to intensify or may be peaking. Recommendations from the impact and needs assessment can now be matched up with the prototype response plans (section 2.6.), as appropriate, to formulate a set of detailed responses to the food crisis. Contingency planners (or other authorities) must ensure that these responses are consistent with the management capacity of local partners, the absorptive capacity of the logistical infrastructure, proposed targeting and distribution mechanisms, and other key elements of contingency and preparedness planning.

To overcome the frequent criticism that early warning does not lead to early response, those with the right information (EW/FS professionals) must maintain strong links with those who have authority to influence action (such as the contingency planning group). Throughout this phase, early warning/food security units can be most helpful themselves by providing accurate information and timely analysis that decision-makers need to speed up their relief responses. However, **EW/FS professionals should not participate in the actual implementation of these responses as this falls outside their core responsibilities.**

This section summarizes the usual options for responding to food crises. These options are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The challenge is to combine short-term relief and longer-term development options in mutually reinforcing ways. The best kind of relief plan meets the immediate and short-term needs in a way that promotes the capacities of those struck by crisis and reduces their longer term vulnerabilities. Moreover, the best solutions to problems often come from the people most affected by them.

4.1. Link Contingency Plan with Results of Impact and Needs Assessment. Planned responses must be flexible to changes in indicators, indicator levels and threats to food security. As the food crisis continues to intensify, it will cause multiple and overlapping threats to immediate and short-term food security. These threats generally concern crop and livestock production; food availability and prices; employment and income; and food utilization (or health and nutrition). Response planners, **with help from EW/FS professionals, should link the specific threats identified by the impact and needs assessment and other early warning information to the previously developed contingency plan for the respective group or area.** This will enable them to reassess which threats are most serious to food security and livelihood systems in terms of magnitude and timing as well as add specificity to the prototype response plans.

4.2. Review and Select an Appropriate Mix of Response Options. After reassessing the current most serious threats to food security, response planners need to review and select a combination of options to mitigate their impact. An optimal mix of response options is likely to include policy adjustments (such as suspension of food import duties), programs (such as expanded supplemental feeding of children) and projects (such as food for work). All options might be based on the prototype response plans.

Food crisis responses fall into four broad categories (generally ranging from immediate to delayed effect):

- direct food and income transfers;
- labor-intensive public works;

- asset transfers and credit programs; and
- agricultural technology development and transfers (von Braun, *et al.*).

Each has its particular costs, phasing of implementation, timeliness of impact, duration, scope or scale, management complexity, opportunities for local participation in decisions, and other considerations. Some are more appropriate for immediate relief and others for longer-term structural changes.

Under the best circumstances, contingency plans will have already identified prototype response plans and related policy changes for similar threats to the same areas and socioeconomic groups. In such cases, selecting the appropriate relief responses may simply be a matter of confirming or adjusting previous choices. A related consideration is whether an existing activity could be simply expanded to meet rapidly growing needs. Expansion might be sufficient, taking advantage of the local presence of an implementing agency, provided famine conditions do not overwhelm the expanded effort and provided extra food and non-food resources are already on hand or nearby.

EW/FS professionals can make a significant and valuable contribution to linking information — and analysis of information — to the review and selection of appropriate relief response options based on their knowledge of the nature, magnitude, and extent of the food crisis, and based on what is needed and what is possible, what will work and what will not.

4.3. Develop Relief Response Proposals. This step entails adding the necessary technical, operational and managerial, and budgetary details to the selected relief responses. If outside funding is sought, this step also includes a formal proposal for funding. It may not be possible to be precise about every aspect of the plan early in a food crisis. However, including these points in the proposal indicates that these will be reviewed and completed in due course.

The relief response proposal needs to be brief, in view of its necessary rapid preparation and approval, but sufficiently detailed to demonstrate technical soundness and practicality. A proposal can be structured along the following lines.

- Summary; background and justification;
- Goal, purposes and objectives;
- Planning assumptions;
- Identification of beneficiaries;
- Activities;
- Role of the private sector; role of markets;
- Resource needs; budget covering donor inputs; local community and government contributions and participation;
- Monitoring, reporting and evaluation;
- Expected end of response plan impact; and exit strategy (phase-out).

EW/FS professionals will not normally develop such proposals themselves but may be asked for their views about their soundness and practicality.

4.4. Implement Relief Plans. **Implementing the relief plan is the business of government and donor agencies and NGOs, not EW/FS professionals.** Most decisions taken during the first few months of any food crisis, when the situation is likely to be chaotic and confused, should be reviewed later on. Avoid any abrupt “surprises” with the local community and others by scheduling reviews in advance.

Experience across Africa shows that community leaders continue to serve useful functions during the implementation of a response plan in such areas as beneficiary screening, allocating assistance and resolving disputes. They can help inject a sense of fairness in the midst of stress.

Finally, it is essential that government and donor agencies and NGOs coordinate their relief efforts closely, both for the sake of effective short-term relief operations and for continuity with longer-term rehabilitation and development efforts. This entails sharing information and operation evaluations that may suggest changes in approach, beneficiaries or scale of effort. Frequent meetings among field managers are more important where there are multiple agencies carrying out operations in a small area.

Annex 1. Completing the Food Crisis Sequence

Annex 1 of these *Guidelines* briefly highlights the remaining steps to complete the food crisis sequence for contingency planning and response as the food crisis peaks and wanes — recovery and development and evaluation. These final steps in the sequence are included here so EW/FS professionals can become familiar with them.

A1. Recovery and Development

The next phase, facilitating recovery and development, proceeds directly from — and may overlap with — the previous phase, providing humanitarian relief. The continuity of objectives in the famine sequence indicate that development objectives should not be set aside during emergencies.

A1.1. Set Recovery and Development Framework — Objectives, Approach, and Timing.

Most objectives to facilitate recovery aim to assist famine-affected people to move from emergency relief to sustainable development in a way that reduces the probability of the recurrence of the food crisis.

It is necessary to determine whether the food crisis has had a mainly localized impact, for which recovery can be limited to the affected areas, or whether the consequences of the crisis were so widespread and serious that a nationwide recovery and development program is required. The greater the extent and severity of the crisis, the more critical it becomes to plan for rehabilitation and recovery within the context of an overall framework, not in haphazard fashion. This framework needs to assess options, strategies, and policies in view of post-crisis opportunities and constraints as well as government priorities. To succeed, the recovery framework needs to build from existing livelihood systems and involve a high degree of participation of the affected population and local authorities.

How soon to launch a rehabilitation, recovery, and development program depends in large measure on the post-crisis political stability, institutional capacity and the scale and complexity of the required response. On one hand, elements of rehabilitation and recovery can be built into short-term relief operations from the start. On the other hand, it would be premature to launch a recovery program while conditions remain unsettled.

A1.2. Build a Recovery and Development Framework

A1.2.1. Mount a Team to Review Options and Develop Recovery Framework. The food crisis –contingency planning group is well suited for monitoring the post-crisis recovery and participating in discussions of development options and strategies. These discussions will be usually held under the auspices of a central or sector planning unit. This unit will put a multi-sectoral team into place — with outside support as necessary — to develop the recovery framework and set its objectives.

A1.2.2. Conduct the Recovery and Development Review. The review may be carried out in two phases, such as a review of the options in the first phase and the design of strategies and recovery and development program in the second phase. The same composition of team members is desirable for continuity, but these phases are sometimes carried out by different teams under different donor funding.

A1.2.3. Seek Consensus for the Recovery and Development Framework. How the review is carried out is equally important as its content, especially as concerns ownership by the government and affected people as stakeholders in their country's recovery. The review team will need to confront complex and contentious issues affecting sectoral development for which early and frequent consultations will be necessary to build a policy consensus. Periodic seminars and workshops provide the opportunity

for review and discussion of each major theme, set of issues, findings and recommendations. These can bring together the interested government and international review team members, UN agencies, donors, NGOs, affected communities and others.

A1.2.4. Identify Priority Recovery and Development Investments. The preceding analysis of constraints, options, and strategies should lead directly and explicitly to a coherent program of high priority investments that will jumpstart recovery and development in the sector reviewed. Investment proposals should be consistent with government policies, build on the achievements of relief operations and any rehabilitation program; support (but preferably not depend on) progress in recommended institutional reforms and restructuring; and be amenable to discrete financing commitments.

A1.2.5. Design Recovery and Development Projects. Where review teams readily identify priority projects for funding, suitable project designs can be included in an annex to the main report. This rapid identification has the advantage of allowing the government to approach donors and financial institutions with a minimum of delay. It also speeds up project formulation by the government and donor and mobilizes resources for implementation all the more rapidly. Other projects may be developed as the recovery continues.

A1.3. Implement Longer-Term Recovery and Development Programs and Projects. Once project activities have been formulated and funded, the final step is for government agencies, financial institutions, and donors to implement longer-term response(s) and program(s) to avert recurrence of similar food crises.

A2. Evaluation of Response and Recovery

One of the most compelling needs during a food crisis is an overall information strategy to guide the design and management of both emergency relief and recovery programs. Components of a crisis information system include regular and systematic monitoring of current conditions, periodic evaluations and thorough documentation of lessons learned that are relevant to the design and implementation of future crisis interventions.

A2.1. Monitor Conditions on an Ongoing Basis. Frequent monitoring over the course of a relief operation and recovery program serves a dual purpose — a measurement of change and a management information tool. For example, monitoring qualitative changes in socioeconomic conditions and the welfare of the affected populations might signal where adjustments or changes in relief operations are appropriate.

Most essential information can be obtained and centralized through routine monitoring of key indicators, such as food commodity tracking systems, local market information systems, early warning systems and nutrition surveillance sites. Reports from field staff or participatory workshops offer other sources of information. Occasional formal surveys can gather related data and information to complement and cross-check routinely monitored data. Informal methods, including personal observations and judgment, are equally important as indicators about how the response and recovery are proceeding. Decision-making meetings are an important outcome of the monitoring process. The frequency of these meetings depends on the unpredictability of the situation and the complexity of the work.

Keep the information collection and reporting system as simple as possible. Collect both qualitative and quantitative information. This information should be practical and exactly what decision-makers and response managers need to know. Collect only as much information as needed and as can be

processed. Collecting information that synthesizes many variables into a few is a cost-effective and time-saving approach. Identify opportunities for the affected communities to help monitor information. Ensure delivery of time-sensitive information in time to inform and guide decisions.

A2.2. Evaluate Impact of the Relief Response and Recovery Program. Evaluations are also necessary to provide an objective assessment of issues and achievements and to examine overall strategies and approaches. Evaluations review past work to assess their impact and relevance, but they also take a look forward to give direction and guidance.

Impact evaluation starts from the original (or revised) goals and objectives of the relief response as well as the goals and objectives of activities and project investments in the recovery program. For example, the evaluation might look at the economic impact of the response effort (such as agriculture and livestock incentives, market prices, labor wages, and transport costs and the rate of return of displaced people to their homes).

Systematic monitoring and collection of information and data during the emergency response phase provide the basis — and baseline — for the evaluation of post-crisis recovery projects. Other sources of information, such as interviews with key informants or those working in other agencies, are useful in verifying or challenging indicator information and conclusions. Periodic field reports and surveys round out the sources of useful primary information for most relief and recovery evaluations. Secondary data, such as macroeconomic indicators, often give useful contextual information and are specially suitable as impact indicators for recovery programs.

A2.3. Document Key Lessons Learned. Evaluations of current relief responses and recovery programs provide critical lessons for the design and implementation of *future* interventions. If successive evaluations uncover the same problems, this is an indication that there has been a failure to apply lessons learned — possibly because these lessons were not clearly explained, inadequately documented and poorly circulated. Teams evaluating responses and recovery programs need to summarize the successes and failures of each operation — and straightforwardly identify the elements of success and factors of failure. Response and recovery planners, managers, and funding agencies also have an obligation to document lessons learned so others can avoid similar pitfalls.

This takes the process back to the final step in contingency planning — periodic updating of contingency plans based on the effectiveness of responses to recent food crises.

PARTIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

Charles Chopak. “Early Warning Monitoring and Reporting: Towards a Broader Approach.” (SADC Regional Early Warning System for Food Security: Harare), May 2000.

Thomas E. Downing. *Assessing Socioeconomic Vulnerability to Famine: Frameworks, Concepts and Applications*. FEWS Working Paper. Final Report to the U. S. Agency for International Development Famine Early Warning System. (Washington, D. C.: FEWS), January 30, 1991.

FAO Emergency Activities: Technical Handbook Series. (Rome: FAO), 1999.

John Osgood Field, editor. *The Challenge of Famine: Recent Experiences, Lessons Learned*. (West Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian Press), 1993.

Government of Ethiopia. *National Policy on Disaster prevention and Management*. (Addis Ababa), 1993.

Government of Namibia. *National Drought Policy and Strategy*. (Windhoek), 1997.

Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance. *Mitigation Practitioner's Handbook*. (Washington, D. C.: OFDA), 1998.

Oxfam. *Working in Emergencies: Practical guidance from the field series*. (Oxford, U. K.: Oxfam), no date.

Frank Z. Riely. “Vulnerability Assessment in the FEWS Project.” Final Draft. USAID Famine Early Warning System Project. (Washington, D. C.: FEWS), June 29, 1993.

Joachim von Braun, Tesfaye Teklu, and Patrick Webb. *Famine in Africa: Causes, Responses and Prevention*. (Washington, D. C.: IFPRI), 1999.

World Food Programme. *Emergency Needs Assessment Guidelines*. Technical Support Services, Operations Department (ODT). (Rome: WFP), October 1999.

Please contact the author for a full bibliography of the sources reviewed for these *Guidelines*.